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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001644

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR GOLDBERGER/SACHAR; PRM  
FOR PRM/ANE; NSC FOR PASCUAL; TREASURY FOR ROSE; PLEASE  
PASS TO USAID FOR KUNDER/MCCLOUD/BORODIN

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA: HIGH PARTICIPATION RATES IN PUBLIC SECTOR  
STRIKE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Gaza public sector labor strike that began on August 30 has been extended to at least September 9. Participation rates have been high - an estimated 90 percent among teachers and 50 percent among health care workers. PA officials and labor leaders told Econoffs that Gaza's public sector employees are unhappy with Hamas and its discriminatory policies against non-Hamas affiliated workers. PA contacts said that hundreds of teachers and health care workers have been jailed or forced to work since the strike began August 30. End summary.

90 percent of Gaza teachers on strike;  
600 jailed for "losing their religion"

12. (C) Secretary General of the PA Teachers' Union Jamil Shihadah told Econoff on September 3 that he expects the labor strike to continue for "many weeks," despite his office's recent press release stating that it may end September 9. He said that 90 percent of Gaza's 10,000 public sector teachers are participating fully in the strike, which began August 30. The teachers' union is protesting Hamas's violent and discriminatory policies against non-Hamas-affiliated teachers and demanding an official apology from Hamas, according to Shihadah. He said that Hamas has arrested at least 600 teachers who went on strike in the last week, accusing them of "losing their religion" and therefore no longer being qualified to teach Muslim children. Shihadah underscored that the high participation rate among teachers is evidence of the public's growing discontent with Hamas, as at least one-third of teachers have historically been Hamas supporters.

Hoping to expose Hamas as a Gaza minority

13. (C) Shihadah stated that "the media conveys the idea that Hamas is the majority in Gaza, but this strike will prove that to be false," adding that "Hamas's goal of Gaza as an Islamic emirate and an example for the whole world" is being undermined by the strike. (Note: Shihadah noted that 95 percent of the teachers in Gaza receive their monthly salaries from the PA, while the remaining five percent, most of whom were appointed by Hamas to top administrative duties since the June 2007 takeover, are on the Hamas payroll. End note.)

PA claims no role in the strike;  
50 percent of health care workers participate

14. (C) PA Deputy Minister of Health Anan Masri told Econoff

on September 3 that around 50 percent of the nearly 7,000 "ministry of health" employees in Gaza continue to participate in the strike. Masri underscored that the PA had no role in the strike. He speculated that those involved in the strike want to end Hamas's mistreatment of health care professionals, many of whom have been replaced with Hamas appointees and demoted in the bureaucracy since the Hamas takeover in June 2007.

15. (C) PA Prime Minister Advisor on Budget and Finance Affairs Karim Nashashibi told Econoff on September 3 that "teachers will be paid by the PA whether or not they strike." He implied that all other striking public sector workers would continue to receive salaries, adding that the PA has not pressured any employee to participate in the Gaza strike.

Hamas gunmen force doctors to work  
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16. (C) WHO Gaza Director Mahmoud Daher confirmed to Econoff on September 3 that nearly 50 percent of Gaza's public sector health care personnel have been on strike since August 30. Daher said that numerous non-Hamas-affiliated doctors have been relocated in recent months in order to make room for Hamas's hand-picked appointees and that these actions were the principal causes of the strike. He said Hamas security forces have forced hundreds of striking doctors to report for duty at hospitals and/or clinics, jailing those who refuse. Health sector strike organizers announced on September 2 that the strike would continue to September 9, in coordination with the teachers strike.

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17. (C) Daher said that the strike's impact on the Gaza health care sector has been significant, as many Gazans are now looking to NGO and private hospitals for immediate health care needs. He said that doctors and nurses not participating in the strike are working 15-20 hour days because of the staffing shortages. (Note: Daher said that of the estimated 7,000 employees of Gaza's public health sector, around 85 percent receive their salaries from the PA, while the remaining 15 percent, most of whom were appointed to top management positions by Hamas in the last year, are on the Hamas payroll. End note.)

WALLES